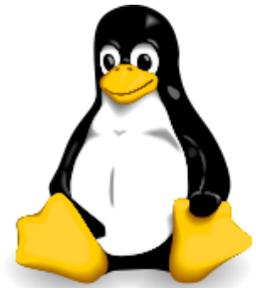


TEST DRIVING LINUX USING A LIVE CD

So you've heard about Linux, and you're itching to try it out. Why? Maybe you want to breathe some life into an older computer that can't run Windows XP or Vista. Maybe you want to stretch your technical skills a bit. Or, maybe you're just tired of Windows and need a change.

Normally, you install Linux in a couple of ways. One way is to use it to take over an entire hard drive. Or, you can partition your hard drive and have Windows on one portion of it and Linux on another. But, if you find that a particular version of Linux (called a distribution) isn't quite right for you, getting rid of it or changing it can be a pain.

Another alternative is to use a Live CD. A Live CD, sometimes called a Live Distro, is an operating system that starts from a CD -- there is no need to install the operating system on a hard drive. A Live CD is a great way to test out Linux without worrying about what it may do to your computer.



Getting Hold of a Live CD

Most major, and many minor, Linux distributions have Live CD versions. These include Ubuntu, Knoppix, Linspire, MEPIS, and Debian. You can find a list of Live CD distributions [here](#) and [here](#). You can either order a Live CD from the developer -- for which, in many cases, you may have to pay a nominal fee for shipping. The folks behind Ubuntu, for example, will send you several CDs for free.

Or, you can burn your own Live CD. All you have to do is download an ISO image from the Web site

of whatever distribution you plan to use. An ISO image is sometimes called a “CD image” and is literally a snapshot of the contents of a disk in a single file. The snapshot comes complete with the core operating system, the software that's bundled with it, as well as the necessary boot and disk information. An ISO image has the extension .iso, for example, ubuntu-6.10-desktop-i386.iso.

Then, you just burn the ISO image to a CD. While burning the image is relatively easy, the process differs slightly from burning your ordinary files to a CD. The instructions vary depending on which CD burning software you use. You should check the documentation for your CD burning software for

details on how to burn an ISO image. Note that the CD creation features built into Windows XP can't properly write ISO images.



Or, you can go one better and use the ISO Recorder Power Toy for Windows XP and Vista. This nifty little application makes the job easy by allowing you to just drag and drop the image onto a CD.

Using a Live CD



Once you have the ISO image on a CD, what do you do? Just insert the CD in your computer's CD-ROM drive and restart your computer.

When your computer reboots, it should start from the CD rather than from the hard drive. If yours is an older computer or you've changed some of the settings, you'll need to configure your PC to boot from a

CD. To do this, you'll have to change the boot settings in the BIOS (Basic Input/Output System, which tells your computer what it can do without the computer accessing any software on the hard disk).

Restart your computer, then quickly press the Delete or ESC key on your keyboard (systems vary).

You might either have to press the key multiple times or hold it down for a few seconds. The BIOS

setting screen should then appear. Find the boot settings options (the location of which will vary depending on the type of BIOS your computer uses), and set it up so that the computer boots from a CD-ROM drive first. Then, press the F10 key on your keyboard to save and exit.

If all goes well, and it should, Linux will start and your computer's hardware - video card, sound, network, and even wireless networking should all work. How well or badly a Live CD does this depends on the Linux distribution and your hardware. I used an Ubuntu Live CD with a ThinkPad T40 notebook and the only hardware that it didn't seem to detect was the modem. Don't worry about having to work at the command line - just about every Linux distribution starts up with a graphical interface, like KDE or GNOME.

From there, you can fiddle around with Linux to your heart's content.

You can use the bundled software, work at the command line (if so desired), and change the look and feel of the user interface. But, remember that the Live CD version of a Linux distribution will run slower than one installed on a hard drive. That's because the software is loaded into memory and anything else is read off the CD which takes time. You can get a good idea of what Linux is like and what it can do.



The best thing about using a Live CD is that you can test as many different Linux distributions as you like. This gives you a chance to find one that fits your bill. It's easy, and all you need to do is be willing to sacrifice a little connection time and a few blank CDs.

Other Uses of Live CDs

A Live CD isn't just a great way to test out Linux and determine if a particular distribution works with your hardware. There are a number of Live CDs that have special purposes like scientific applications,

router and server use, firewall and system administration, and more.

For example, GhostWriter is aimed at people writing screenplays, short stories, and novels. EZWebPC lets you set up a kiosk that gives people quick access to the Web and email. Others, like Protech andGibraltar Firewall, are tools for protecting a network. There are also Live CD distributions that turn your computer into a multimedia workstation or a Voice Over IP server.

On top of that, a number of tech-savvy Windows users have Live CDs handy as rescue disks. If Windows gets damaged or corrupted, you can use a rescue disk to access and repair your system.

Conclusion

A Live CD is a quick, easy, and painless way to take Linux for a test drive. Not only that, but you can do even more with one. Either way, you're packing a lot of power into a small space.

Source: <http://www.geeks.com/techtips/2007/techtips-25mar07.htm>